

american southwest theatre company history



AMERICAN
SOUTHWEST
THEATRE
COMPANY



A regional theatre attached to New Mexico State University, the American Southwest Theatre Company debuts for its first full year of operation in 1984-85.

A giant step-by-step growth of the theatre program at NMSU over the past few years has led to this permanent, resident company started last winter. The separate yet connected structure of ASTC allows for continued community support, increased number of productions and additional guest actors and directors.

Providing direction for the new theatre's growth is a 27-member citizen board, currently headed by Las Cruces Jack Curry.

"High quality educational programs not only add to the overall depth of the community, but they provide economic enhancements as well," said board president-elect Steve Loman. "The professional company will attract outstanding students as well as prospective business and residents."

Theatre artistic director Mark Medoff, NMSU faculty member who won a Tony Award in 1979 for the play "Children of a Lesser God," noted that an extremely small

proportion of the theatre costs comes from the state appropriate budget. The majority of operation costs must be met from community donations and ticket sales. For both those ends board members are directing their efforts throughout southern New Mexico and El Paso.

Medoff said that few places the size of Las Cruces "have or aspire to the kind of operation that we have," and because of this it makes sense to develop ASTC as a regional theatre.

Theatre growth at NMSU took a leap with the 1981 formation of the Business Alliance for the Theatre, a group of business supporters who each provided a portion of production costs. The Corporate Support of the Arts program won national recognition for two years from the Business Committee for the Arts Inc., a New York based group. The 12 business sponsors from the 1981-82 season were recognized and the next year, with 24 sponsors and nearly \$50,000 in donations, the program was one of three cited for innovation nationally.

This season, sponsors will be recognized at Gala Openings on the first Friday performances. Two special preview nights will precede the Gala—with special ticket prices to attract students.

The corporate support program was initiated when Medoff was theatre arts department head and developed by Bruce Streett, as acting head while Medoff was on sabbatical leave. In March, 1983, Streett became administrative head of the department, heading academic and financial matters. Medoff now oversees the artistic aspects of the theatre.

